Bread: Half Million Sign 'No Ration' Petitions

Daily Sketch 3 July 1946 British Library Newspaper Division, Colindale

Protest march in Cheltenham.

Militant Housewives: the British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government

by James Hinton

Housewives have often been blamed for the demise of Britain's post-war Labour Government in 1951: 'the last election was lost mainly in the queue at the butcher's or the grocer's'.[1] Certainly shortages of food and other household necessities had been a central feature of everyday life in Britain since Attlee swept to power in 1945. Indeed austerity, far from lifting once the war was over, had actually intensified. This was partly a result of world food shortages, and partly of the priority given by the Labour Government – which had inherited a massive balance of payments deficit at the end of the war – to boosting exports at the expense of domestic consumption.[2] Since housewives shouldered the main burden of managing household budgets and coping with the consequences of shortages, it would not be surprising if they had turned against the Government in larger numbers than their husbands.

It has recently been argued that austerity was a major vote loser for the Labour Party, and one that disproportionately influenced female voters.[3] If this had been the case, one would have expected women's votes to move more sharply away from Labour than those of men. In fact, while women were generally less favourable to Labour than men, available poll evidence

TABLE ONE (4): Conservative lead over Labour, 1945–1951 (excluding small parties and don't knows)

	1945	1950	1951	swing 1945–51
Women	– 3	1	4	7
Men	– 19.5	– 6	– 3	16.5

shows quite the reverse: the female swing to the Tories was much smaller than that of the men. (Table One)

If women were particularly likely to blame the Government for austerity, then such feelings must have been outweighed by other considerations. This was especially true of working-class women who, in sharp contrast to their husbands, actually became more favourable to Labour between 1945 and 1950. (Table Two)

TABLE TWO (5): Conservative lead, 1945–1950 (excluding small parties and don't knows)

	1945	1950	swing 1945–50
Middle-class:			
women	35	51	16
men	31	44	13
Working-class:			
women	– 13	– 15	– 2
men	– 37	– 25	12

Even among middle-class women, who moved more strongly against Labour than any other group, hostility to the Government's management of austerity was far from universal. Everyone grumbled in the queues, but there is no reason to doubt the typicality of Mass Observation's 1949 finding that eighty per cent of middle-class housewives in London accepted that rationing was still necessary.[6] They might believe that Conservatives would manage austerity better – Lord Woolton's success as wartime Minister of Food was an abiding asset for the Tories – but facile suggestions that a new Government would be able simply to 'set the people free' would be liable to meet with a sceptical response. As one journalist wrote of opinion in his London suburb shortly before the 1950 general election: 'no one doubts that food subsidies and price controls have alone made a standard of middle-class and lower-middle class family life possible'.[7] However furious the Conservative

attack on Labour, the Party stopped short of suggesting that rationing could be ended so long as shortages remained.[8] In this area, as in others, partisan conflict was ultimately restrained by a common acceptance that post-war reconstruction was not compatible with the immediate restoration of the free market. Among housewives there was only one significant organization which rejected this view and felt no need to qualify its opposition to rationing and controls: the British Housewives' League.

A significant number of housewives belonged to women's organizations in post-war Britain. While explicitly feminist organizations had found it difficult to make headway since the 1920s, both major political parties had successfully organized large numbers of women, and were recruiting rapidly in the later 1940s. Non-partisan women's organizations – notably the Women's Institutes and the Townswomen's Guilds – had also grown spectacularly.[9] During the years of austerity in the 1940s many of the women's organizations acted together to lobby Whitehall and Westminster on behalf of the housewife. By and large the non-partisan organizations believed that housewives' interests could best be protected by constructive engagement in the management of scarcity, rather than by adopting an oppositional role.[10] Labour women, in the Co-operative Women's Guilds as well as the Labour Party Women's Sections, naturally took a similar view.[11] Against this background of a widespread readiness among housewives' organizations to co-operate with austerity, or at least tolerate it, the maverick behaviour of the British Housewives' League stands out sharply.

Existing accounts of the League, none of them more than a few pages in length, tell a confusing story. For Elizabeth Wilson the fact that the housewives' rebellion was 'orchestrated by the right does not prove that it spoke only for the right'. The League was the tip of an iceberg of female fury denied broader public expression because Labour women subordinated women's interests to the needs of the Labour Government.[12] Wilson accepted contemporary left-wing accusations that the League was 'certainly a Tory front', and Paul Addison, misunderstanding the evolution of the League's politics in 1947, asserts that 'it became one'.[13] Bea Campbell's fuller and more accurate account describes the League as independent of the Conservative Party, while noting that many Conservatives supported it. Campbell agrees with Wilson that the Attlee Government neglected women's interests, but locates the League more narrowly as the main bearer of 'the Tory women's tradition' in the early post-war years, at a time when the Conservative Party itself was imprisoned in consensus politics.[14]

What were the League's relations with the Conservative Party? How far did it give expression to a genuine housewives' revolt? Was it, as Labour ministers alleged at the time, largely a stunt got up by the right-wing press? What was its social and geographical base? And what light does the League's history throw on the political and psychological characteristics of the 'militant housewife' – herself, perhaps, a contradiction in terms?

Some of these questions can only be answered here in a provisional way.

The BHL still exists and my attempts to gain access to its archive have been unsuccessful.[15] The present account rests largely on the copious coverage of the League's activities in the national and local press, together with its own publications and material in the Conservative Party archives.

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Austerity had never been popular, but the leap from everyday grumbling to organized protest had to wait until the war was over. There was a brief moment, the political hiatus between polling day on 5 July 1945 and the (delayed) announcement of the election result three weeks later, when it looked as though the remarkable governability of the British people might be breaking down. Churchill was sufficiently alarmed by press reports of unrest and direct action – above all the seizure of empty houses by self-styled 'Vigilantes' on behalf of the homeless – to demand stern measures from his caretaker Ministers: 'lawlessness should not be allowed'.[16] The BHL originated in this moment of unrest.

In June 1945 Irene Lovelock, a South London vicar's wife with three young children, angry about the time women were having to spend queuing in cold and rainy weather, and convinced that her locality was not getting its fair share of food, called a protest meeting in the Church Hall. An Anti-Queue Association was formed to collect signatures on a petition to whoever became the next MP for North Croydon. A similar initiative was launched in Neasden by the wife of the local rabbi, Alfreda Landau, and by mid-July the two women had joined forces to establish a British Housewives' League, claiming support from women elsewhere in Britain as well as in London.[17] Neither of the prime movers had any experience in politics nor any partisan axe to grind. Mrs Landau attributed her social conscience to her childhood experience as daughter of the rabbi – 'a great social worker' – in the South Wales mining town of Tredegar. Mrs Lovelock, whose previous public activity had been confined to the kind of good works expected of the wife of an Anglican vicar, had actually voted Labour in the general election.[18] Within a month 17,000 signatures had been collected for a petition to Parliament, but the momentum was not sustained and only a few hundred women joined the new organization.[19]

What made BHL into a national movement was the realization in early 1946 that austerity, far from gradually ameliorating now that the war was over, was going to get worse. On 5 February, Ben Smith, the Minister of Food, announced that due to world shortages of animal-feed, bacon, poultry and egg rations would all have to be cut. At the same time, in order to save dollars, dried eggs were withdrawn from the shops. Imported from the US during the war, these had become an indispensable substitute for the real thing, and Ben Smith found himself attacked from every quarter.[20] Even Labour MPs criticized the abrupt way in which Smith had announced the cuts.[21] Nella Last, Mass Observation's lower middle-class Conservative-voting diarist from Barrow, expressed a widespread feeling when she contrasted Smith's inept handling of the cuts with the ethos of wartime

government: 'They seem to be so afraid – Winston Churchill never hesitated to tell us the worst, and you felt brave and strong with him'.[22] Labour women, while publicly defending the unfortunate Minister, minuted their anxiety about the success with which the press and the newsreels were exploiting the food situation for anti-government purposes.[23]

Opponents of the BHL frequently attacked it as a press stunt got up by a Tory press anxious to discredit the Labour Government. Certainly media exposure played a vital part in the dynamics of the housewives' revolt, as of most popular movements operating without well-established communication channels of their own.[24] Some newspapers took on a manifestly campaigning role. In July 1945 the London *Evening News* had boosted Mrs Lovelock, and almost daily ran front-page stories of its own fearless harassment of Whitehall over measures to reduce queuing. In February 1946 the *Sunday Graphic* invited Mrs Lovelock to keep in touch with her followers through a weekly column, while the Manchester *Daily Dispatch* launched a regular investigative column on housewives' grievances. Both these papers belonged to Lord Kemsley, whose newspaper chain was later attacked by Herbert Morrison as the main purveyor of anti-government propaganda.[25] Two Kemsley provincial dailies were singled out for criticism by the Royal Commission on the Press for carrying stories on 'the chorus of dismay from the housewives of Britain' written at a time – immediately after Smith's announcement of the February 1946 cuts – before any such 'chorus' had in fact materialized.[26] But the housewives' revolt was not simply an invention of the right-wing press. Editors were as much responding to the rage of a section of their female readership (expressed in the very large numbers of letters which flooded their offices when housewives' protests were reported), as engaging in a calculated attempt to manufacture protest for partisan purposes. Indeed the first wave of protest – in July 1945 – had taken off at a time when nobody knew who would be running the next Government, and most Conservatives expected it would be them.

In February 1946 the storm centre of the housewives' revolt was in Liverpool, perhaps because the ration cuts coincided with attempts already under way in the correspondence columns of the local press to organize local housewives against 'the dictatorship of the queue'.[27] Indignant housewives queuing in the middle-class suburb of Childwell got together on the day after the announcement to telegraph Ben Smith: 'Women of Liverpool are prepared to demonstrate against ration cuts'. The lead was taken by Constance Hill, an active community worker and an official of the local Townswomen's Guild. Next day 700 women tried to cram into a small pavilion owned by the local Tenants' Association, where Mrs Hill summed up their feelings:

> We are suffering from mental exhaustion, irritation and frustration. The smiling mother of yesterday is the bad-tempered mother of today, and the understanding partner is now the nagging wife. . . . We are under-fed, under-washed, and over-controlled.[28]

Across the river, in Wallasey, a Women's Protest Movement used a loudspeaker van to get 2,000 women to a rally.[29] At follow-up meetings throughout the conurbation, speakers stressed the non-partisan character of the movement: 'We don't care two hoots – most of us – what Party is in', declared Mrs Hill: 'We are much too busy with our own homes'.[30] The accuracy of this claim is difficult to judge. At many of these meetings Victor Reakes, a local Tory MP, or his wife, was on the platform. But although Bessie Braddock dismissed the agitation as a Tory stunt, the Labour chairman of the Merseyside group of MPs was more sympathetic and a meeting between a deputation from the Wallasey housewives and Edith Summerskill, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food, appears to have been marked by understanding and good humour on both sides.[31]

Although the Liverpool movement made contact with Mrs Lovelock, it did not at this stage affiliate to her organization.[32] Outside the North West, and a rather surprising telegram from 600 members of the Govan Tenants' Association who threatened to 'force our husbands to strike if our rations were reduced',[33] there does not appear to have been a great deal of organized protest. On the day the issue was to be debated in Parliament the BHL assembled a few hundred women, mainly from London and the Home Counties, to lobby MPs.[34] Although Smith put an end to the agitation by reversing the withdrawal of dried egg from the shops, the cuts had touched a raw nerve and support for the BHL mushroomed. Thousands of housewives sent off their subscription to the Croydon vicarage, quite overwhelming Mrs Lovelock and her helpers.[35] Regional organizers were appointed, branches proliferated, and by the end of March someone had been found to take on the secretarial job full time.[36] These moves towards a co-ordinated national organization were, however, far from complete. There was still plenty of room for spontaneous initiative, as the next upheaval was to show.

The announcement of bread rationing, made by John Strachey – who had replaced Ben Smith at the Ministry of Food – four weeks ahead of its introduction in July 1946, unleashed a storm of protest. Throughout the war bread had remained off-ration, the reliable staple when the cupboard was bare. Unlike the February cuts, bread rationing had been long anticipated because of widely discussed shortages in global grain supplies. The need for rationing had less to do with securing any sizeable immediate cuts in consumption, however, than with gaining control in anticipation of a possible crisis if stocks ran low before the new harvest came in and with enhancing Britain's moral position in haggling with the USA over responsibility for feeding occupied Germany.[37] Unwilling to spell out the latter consideration – sacrifice on behalf of ex-enemy populations was not a popular cause[38] – the Government left itself open to the accusation, seized on by the Conservative opposition and the right-wing press, that the case had not been made.[39]

Outside parliament angry housewives were quick to mobilize. On 16 June Mrs Lovelock used her column in the *Sunday Graphic* to urge women to

make known their opposition to bread rationing. Following a broadcast by Strachey that night, Mrs Mary Were, a housewife who worked part-time as a BBC researcher, walked a mile to the phone box from her home in the Buckinghamshire commuter belt to express her anger to the *Graphic* newsroom. Within a week, encouraged by support from local shoppers, she had launched a petition to the King, and appealed through the columns of the *Daily Sketch* for every town and village in the country to elect its own 'food protest officer' and to contact her newly formed British Housewives' National Revolt Campaign. The continuing patchiness of BHL organization is clear from the support gained by Mrs Were in many parts of the country including, significantly, Liverpool where the Merseyside Housewives' League launched her petition at a rally attended by 3000 women on 2 July.[40] By mid-July, Mrs Were was claiming 200,000 signatures, including 15,000 from Glasgow and 14,000 from Birmingham.[41] Nevertheless, it was the BHL which was best placed to benefit from the new agitation, and Mrs Were's campaign did not outlive the immediate crisis.[42] Existing BHL branches recruited rapidly and new ones proliferated. During these weeks the housewives' revolt took on a genuinely national dimension as women in all parts of the country followed the example set earlier by London and Liverpool.[43] 'We've been wondering what we could do for months', the leader of the Bristol agitation told a local journalist: 'Then we read of the activities of housewives in other parts of the country and decided that someone must take a lead here'. At first the Bristol women, jealous of their autonomy, intended to keep their organization purely local. But, where the League had a regional organizer in place, it was easy to channel such spontaneous initiatives into their own organization.[44] When the BHL followed Mrs Were by launching its own petition it rapidly outstripped its rival. As the forms came in, Mrs Lovelock took on paid staff to count the signatures in her newly opened London office. By mid-July she was claiming 600,000 signatures – although half of these were on improperly worded forms and had to be delivered to the Ministry of Food rather than presented to Parliament.[45]

There was some debate in the movement about whether petitioning was enough. Mrs Were had called for 'a giant march', and the BHL agreed to support her in organizing a Trafalgar Square rally.[46] Unwisely, they also co-operated with Eleonara Tennant, who ran an anti-semitic 'Face The Facts Association' which specialized in abusing German refugees.[47] Not many people turned up for the rally, which degenerated into a shouting match between Mrs Tennant and anti-fascist hecklers. Although some League activists had links with far-right and anti-semitic organizations,[48] it seems unlikely that the BHL had done much more than lend its name to Tennant's initiative, and Mrs Lovelock was quick to distance herself from the Trafalgar Square events.[49] 'Many are crying out for demonstrations', she had written: 'Let us have them. I say, as I have said before, that our strength lies in our solid membership . . . go on building up the League'.[50] At the

League's own London rally speakers argued for some more forceful form of protest – 'a policy from women that would make bread rationing impossible' – and on Merseyside, Constance Hill promised that secret preparations were underway for unspecified actions.[51] Mainly the housewives pinned their hopes of preventing rationing on the bakers, many of whom were alarmed at the implications of bread rationing for their own workloads. In Cheltenham 5,000 people – 'housewives and bakers' – marched through the streets in a procession led by bread vans.[52] During the final days before rationing was due to be introduced the Government faced down a threat from the National Association of Master Bakers, representing the small and independent bakeries responsible for about a third of the nation's bread, to boycott rationing.[53]

Unknown to the protesters the Cabinet itself was seriously divided about the wisdom of pressing ahead with rationing. Indications of a bumper Canadian harvest persuaded Strachey, at the eleventh hour, to propose postponing the start of the scheme, in the hope that it would prove unnecessary.[54] A furious argument followed in which Attlee overruled his Food Minister and insisted on the scheme going ahead. The major consideration in the minds of Attlee and his supporters appears to have been fears about reactions in the US, where the fact that the British were about to introduce bread rationing had played a significant role in persuading Congress to approve the loan negotiated by Keynes. 'The decision to ration bread had raised the moral stature of the UK throughout the world', declared Aneurin Bevan: 'If that decision were now reversed all that would be lost'.[55] But they were also worried that, by appearing to capitulate to the protesters – as Smith had done over dried eggs – they would do more harm to the credibility of the Government than by pressing ahead. Herbert Morrison, more sensitive than most to the interests of the housewife, was outraged by the suggestion that she should be made to suffer just to save the Government's face.[56] But for Ellen Wilkinson, the only woman in the Cabinet, Attlee's argument was more convincing. Labour Party women, though sharing the general view that bread rationing would be 'more irksome to the housewife' than any existing controls, had nevertheless loyally supported the Government's 'courageous decision' to ration bread and condemned the 'mean and squalid campaign' against it.[57] Wilkinson felt that a decision to abandon rationing would be deeply demoralizing for 'our Labour women who have had to fight this out on the doorstep and in the queue, and would have to face the triumphant Tory woman'.[58] The fact that the BHL was offering to co-operate in a campaign to cut down voluntarily on bread wastage – exactly what Strachey was now proposing to cover the Government's retreat – only increased the danger that a last-minute change of course would look like capitulation to the opposition.[59] Those who complained that the Government was playing politics with the housewife were, it seems, uncomfortably close to the truth.

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Overall the evidence of the opinion polls supports the view of those ministers who believed that once people understood that bread rationing would not mean any substantial decrease in supplies they would accept it. The real damage to Labour's reputation with the housewife had been caused by the ration cuts of February 1946. As it became apparent that austerity, far from easing now the war was over, was going to get worse, Labour's lead among women voters over the Conservatives fell from twenty-three to a mere one per cent between January and May. Many of those middle-class women who had deserted the Tories in 1945 now swung back to the right. At the same time large numbers of working-class women withdrew their support from Labour without, however, embracing any alternative party.[60] The impact of bread rationing was both less serious and less uniform. While housewives were, naturally, more worried about the introduction of rationing than any other group, the number saying that they could manage very – or fairly – well rose from fifty-four per cent at the outset of the scheme in July to seventy per cent a month later.[61] Since bread consumption tended to vary inversely with income, it was working-class families who were most likely to suffer from the introduction of rationing. This had encouraged better-off opponents of the Government, who did not expect the ration to cut their own consumption, to hope that rationing would mobilize working-class women against Labour. One Chelsea housewife confessed to Mass Observation that she felt 'almost jubilant' at this prospect, and another explained: 'Bread's different to everything else, because the poorer classes eat so much of it. I hope there'll be riots. I'd like to see some of those Labour men lynched'.[62] Such hopes were disappointed. While working-class housewives worried about the size of the ration, and demands were made for extra allowances for heavy workers and larger families, *Labour Woman* was probably correct in saying that most women realized 'that rationing is the only way to ensure fair shares and equitable distribution of bread while the shortage lasts'.[63] As anxiety about bread rationing fell during the two months from its peak in late June the proportion of working-class housewives disapproving of the Government's record fell from thirty-nine to thirty-three per cent. But middle-class housewives, whose anxieties had never been so great, moved in the opposite direction – from fifty-two to fifty-five per cent.[64] The three by-elections held in the midst of the crisis appear to tell a similar story, with a large swing against the Government in suburban Bexley, but much smaller swings in the more proletarian seats of Battersea North and Pontypool.[65] Whatever hopes middle-class opponents of the Government may have entertained about winning the mass of working-class housewives to their side, the housewives' revolt remained predominantly a middle-class phenomenon.

Although some working-class housewives were attracted to the BHL, the social composition and ethos of the organization were more accurately represented by the Liverpool woman who claimed that the protests of

February 1946 represented 'genuine middle-class feeling'.[66] Both in Bristol and Liverpool, the areas where protest took off were predominantly middle-class suburbs; and the same was true of the BHL presence in and around London. All the leaders of the movement about whom I have been able to get biographical details were middle-class.

Why did these women feel the need to create a new organization? Middle-class housewives already had organizations through which they could express their views and defend their corporate interests. Both the Women's Institutes and the Townswomen's Guilds were flourishing, and both organizations had increasingly taken on the function of the housewife's advocate as 1940s austerity drew her work into the political domain.[67] Such advocacy, however, had little in common with the spirit of revolt which suffused the BHL. For the established voluntary organizations the housewife was above all a responsible citizen. It was precisely through her constructive co-operation in the disciplines of austerity that the housewife could win enhanced status within the polity.[68] Her claim to citizenship rested on her capacity to cope. It is true that the Ministry of Food's use of volunteer 'Food Leaders', many of them supplied by the Women's Voluntary Service and the Women's Institute, to explain the details of the bread rationing scheme in 1946 caused indignation among Conservative women involved in both organizations.[69] By and large, however, the mainstream women's organizations were much too involved in the administration of austerity to countenance outright opposition to measures deemed essential by the Government.[70] The existing voluntary organizations provided little outlet for those women who were not prepared to respond to patriotic calls for self-sacrifice; women who were not, any longer, prepared to cope. Occasionally the BHL spoke the language of constructive co-operation, as when they offered to participate in a campaign against bread wastage in July 1946.[71] Generally, however, the pursuit of power through participation was not the BHL style. These women were fed up. They preferred the argument of the last straw, the rhetoric of revolt.

Despite its middle-class basis, many of the grievances expressed by the BHL were more widely felt. The absence of coupons for household linen, which forced housewives to sacrifice their own clothing coupons for the good of the household, focussed resentment on gender rather than class lines.[72] 'Luxury feeding' – the freedom of the rich to eat what they liked in expensive restaurants – was an issue which triggered anger across the social and political spectrum, and the leader of the Wallasey housewives in February 1946 was careful to exempt works canteens and British Restaurants from her demands for cuts in the allocation of food supplies to caterers.[73] A similarly democratic tone was apparent at the BHL's London rally in February 1946, where the *Daily Herald* reporter noted that attacks on 'under-the-counter' dealing and the black market met with approval from all sections of the audience, including left-wingers who had little in common with the League's leaders.[74] When, in August 1946, the secretary of the Harrow branch

resigned from the League because of its opposition to bread rationing, the black market was one of the two issues which she believed the League should have been concentrating on.[75] The other was the queue.

The BHL had originated in July 1945 as a campaign against the queue, and its initial thrust was directed as much against the shopkeeper as the Whitehall bureaucrat.[76] June MacDonald, who became involved early in 1946, recalled the importance of this issue:

> Women were very cross, they were very cross with how they were being treated by shopkeepers. They'd had a very raw deal during the war, there was a great deal of queuing and some shopkeepers such as fishmongers had made a habit of expecting women to queue up for at least an hour before they'd even open the door and, until they'd seen a nice long queue down the pavement, they wouldn't open up and then after half an hour they'd say 'No more' and bang the shutters down again. . . . After five or six years women were very fed up with that sort of thing, we expected it to end.[77]

Mrs Lovelock, whose anger at the sight of elderly and pregnant women in the queues had triggered the original protest, constantly returned to this issue: 'that terrible tax on women's health and strength'. Women, she protested, were 'not willing to be beasts of burden indefinitely'. She was convinced that shopkeepers could put an end to queues if they chose to put service to the customer before their own convenience and profit. Two years into the BHL's campaign she still gave pride of place to the shopkeeper among the list of 'domineering, petty tyrants who treat women like children'.[78]

While the queue was an inconvenience for women of all classes, and hostility to retail traders belonged at least as much to the Left as to the Right, there was an edge of status anxiety underlying BHL attacks on the 'dictatorship of the shopkeeper'.[79] June Macdonald, whose memories of the queues were quoted above, pursued an active role in both Labour and BHL politics during 1946. Coming from a protected Tory middle-class background, her response to wartime egalitarianism had been ambiguous. On the one hand, her eyes opened by a Northern scholarship girl she encountered at secretarial college, she immersed herself in left-wing literature and joined the Labour Party. On the other hand, she clearly found the uppishness of ordinary uneducated people rather disturbing:

> I was acutely aware that, for the first time in my life anyway, everybody during the war was more or less equal. Of course one was aware of hierarchy in the job, but the moment you got outside and you were confronted with a clippie in charge of a bus, she was in control and you did what she told you, and shop assistants were suddenly very powerful people because things were in short supply.[80]

Tied by the rationing system to a particular shop, dependent for 'under-the-counter' favours on the goodwill of the shopkeeper, forced to

stand in line at the convenience of fishmongers and greengrocers, middle-class housewives felt that the world they knew had been turned upside down. On a Labour Party selection committee in 1945, June Macdonald could be impressed by the fact that

> Air Commodores and Wing Commanders were suddenly applying to be the Labour MP for Uxbridge and that was a revelation to me because I had been brought up to believe that people like that were always Conservatives.

But in the Housewives' League, she found herself among other women whose resentment of queuing was sharpened by the fact that it represented an inversion of the natural authority relationship beween middle-class customer and lower middle-class retailer: 'All these people who, before the war had been rather subservient . . . and always terribly polite, were just the same as everybody else'.[81] 'It is time now that we insisted on service and good manners', wrote Mrs Lovelock, putting her finger on the yearning for the certainties of pre-war suburban English life which underlay the housewives' revolt.[82] When Mrs Bloice, Chairman of the League, was challenged about her romantic view of the pre-war 'English way of life, so dear to us all', loyal supporters in suburban Kent responded: 'We in Bromley wish to assure her that we know exactly what she means'.[83] The heart-felt cry that women's lives were now 'far less worth living than the lives of our grandmothers', expressed a despair about long-term social decline which can have rung few bells amonst working-class women, however hard pressed they felt by the immediate problems of austerity.[84]

The Left accused the BHL of being 'a Tory racket', a front organization through which Conservatives could mobilize opposition to the Government beyond the ranks of their own supporters.[85] In some localities the League was, indeed, used in precisely this way, as Rhona Cooper, organizer of the Kettering branch, explained to Lord Woolton:

> I feel we can do so much by being non-political and although I suppose one could say the majority of the members are Conservative like myself, we really are getting the Labour people to either join or stirring up a definite doubt in their . . . heads as to whether they are backing the right horse! . . . Everyone in this Labour town knows that I belong to the Conservative Party, but I keep the League non-political.[86]

Similarly in Redhill and Reigate the League was set up by a leading figure in the local Tory party.[87] Nevertheless the BHL cannot be understood simply as an arm of the Conservative opposition. Churchill opposed the bakers' threatened boycott, which the BHL enthusiastically embraced.[88] And Waldron Smithers, the Tory MP for Orpington who was most active in presenting anti-rationing petitions to Parliament, was himself a maverick

right-winger, and certainly not a trusted agent of Tory Central Office.[89] Lord Woolton's categoric denial of any links between the Conservative Party and the BHL may have been a tactical move designed to protect the position of women like Mrs Cooper: but it probably also reflected Tory embarrassment about the extremism of the League.[90]

BHL leaders frequently pledged that they would not allow the League to be 'submerged' in the Tory camp, and the rules laid down that 'no members shall attempt to use it for the purpose of forwarding the interests of any party'.[91] 'Party politics', one delegate told a League conference, 'is the bogey of the housewife'.[92] To protect its non-partisan identity the BHL turned down applications from Conservative Associations to join *en bloc*, and forbade office holders to hold office simultaneously in a political party.[93] According to Mrs B. M. Palmer, chairman of the Bromley branch and a long-standing supporter of far-right causes,[94] the main parties were now 'fundamentally identical'; the 'last vestige of conservatism vanished with Mr Bonar Law, and . . . the Baldwin Government of the 1930s paved the way for socialism and planning'.[95] The party system as a whole was described as a political closed shop run by male politicians in their own interests. With the Conservatives co-opted by the enemies of freedom, it was up to the BHL to lead the way 'in the real opposition to totalitarianism'.[96] The BHL was non-partisan, not because it represented a broad-based alliance of housewives across the political spectrum, but because most of its members perceived the Conservatives no less than Labour as being committed to a welfare-state consensus which they found deeply alarming. It is true that some members of the League – most importantly Mrs Lovelock herself – were not entirely at ease with this anti-welfare-state standpoint. Lovelock, after all, had voted Labour in 1945, and a year later she could still write:

> We are thankful that the very poor are better fed. Many of us worked for this for years. Remember it was the previous government who introduced milk and school meals and worked out the social insurance and family allowance schemes. All this Government has done is cut rations.[97]

But this was not a note she often struck.

It was in defence of the home, not merely of their interests as consumers, that the League called on women to organize. A leading objective was 'to show that over-control by the State is not in the interests of a free and happy home life and the development of personality in accord with Christian traditions'.[98] As wives and mothers they had an understanding of genuine human community, which enabled them to resist 'that evil absurdity, the doctrine of equality'. Banding together as 'guardians of the home', the women represented 'a tremendous and DISINTERESTED force . . . without self-seeking aims . . .'[99] The League was 'a spiritual movement', wrote Mrs Lovelock, which aimed 'to put into public life the same spirit shown by women in home life, unselfishness and readiness to serve'. Just

because women's lives were 'bound up with the home and children, and the simple lasting experiences of life', they were better placed than men to 'know what's worth preserving in Britain, and what wants changing'.[100] The underlying objective of the Government, they suspected, was to break resistance to totalitarianism by breaking the spirit of the housewife.[101]

Bread rationing and, in 1947, the fuel economy drive were condemned as 'two of the most powerful means of enslavement ever adopted by unscrupulous politicians'.[102] Driven by the relentless logic of austerity, and its doctrinaire mania for equality, the Labour Government had given 'hordes of officials . . . the right to enter your homes at any time . . . the sanctity of your homes has been destroyed'. The provision of school milk and meals, far from representing a desirable attack on poverty, was part of a conspiracy to destroy the functions of the home.[103] Despite their founder's occasional ambivalence on the issue, the League adopted a stance of total hostility to Labour's 'totalitarian insurance and health service', joining with those doctors who resisted the NHS, and bitterly condemning the all-party conspiracy to introduce Beveridge's compulsory social security insurance.[104]

Second only to the dictatorship of the shopkeeper, Mrs Lovelock fulminated against the patronizing tone adopted by Labour politicians who treat 'reasonable, intelligent women as irresponsible children. Are we not justly angry!'[105] Enid Blyton, who contributed a regular children's story to the *Sunday Graphic*, took time off to berate the politicians:

> I wish I were an MP's wife
> I'd lead him such an awful life . . .
> Has no MP an angry wife
> Who threatens with a carving knife
> And vows that if he rations bread
> She'll see the boys and girls are fed,
> And he must give up half his share
> Because HE made the cupboard bare?[106]

Undoubtedly the worst offender was Emmanuel Shinwell who matched his notorious remark that no-one except the organized working class mattered 'a tinkers cuss' with a contemptuous dismissal of organized women:

> . . . those simple housewives who belong to . . . the Housewives' League. They are not responsible when they march in their infantile demonstrations. To them I would say: 'Lord forgive them for they know not what they do'.[107]

Nothing did more to encourage the League in its paranoia than the decision of the Labour Government in the spring of 1947 to grant trade-union demands for a shorter working week, while simultaneously launching a campaign to recruit housewives back into the factories. It was not simply

that the Government was 'trying to get a 40-hour week for men at the expense of an 80-hour week for mothers': its priorities clearly revealed the underlying totalitarian thrust towards the destruction of the main bastion of resistance to state tyranny – family life.[108] Compulsory insurance was part of the same conspiracy against the family, bribing women away from their domestic duties into paid employment.[109]

And behind the Labour Government stood the trade unions, pressing their own selfish interests at the expense of the housewife:

> Instead of plastering the countryside with pictures of smiling miners [declared Patricia Hornsby-Smith, an eloquent young Conservative candidate speaking alongside the chairman of the BHL] it would be more appropriate if Mr Shinwell would plaster the mining areas with pictures of tired women queuing up for a miserable ration, queuing for a 28-pound bag of coal, (Cheers) one good shovel full from a good miner.[110]

It was not always clear in this kind of rhetoric whether working-class men were naturally vicious, or whether they were the naive victims of Communist subversion. Either way, the Housewives' League was out to teach them a salutary lesson:

> If there are any more of these irresponsible strikes [declared a League speaker in April 1947] . . . both the men concerned, and the subversive agitators behind them, are going to learn just one thing – it is very simple, it is the purpose of our organisation – they are going to learn that the hand that rocked the cradle can also wield the rod of correction.[111]

Audiences cheered such rhetoric; but, in thus embracing the darker side of motherhood, Miss Dorothy Crisp, the League Chairman (whose continued use of her maiden name signified a quite different attitude to her role as a wife and mother to that assumed by the founders of the League), was pushing Mrs Lovelock's projection of the homely virtues as a force for national renewal to its radical limits. Within six months of making this speech, Crisp's excesses were to play a major part in destroying the League as significant force in women's politics.

4

When Dorothy Crisp first arrived on the scene in mid-1946, Mrs Lovelock and Mrs Bloice, exhausted and overwhelmed by the early success of their campaign, were delighted with their new recruit. She founded, wrote and financed the League's *Newsletter* and took over most of Lovelock's speaking engagements.[112] Crisp belonged to an altogether higher social bracket than the BHL founders: she had a private income and a clutch of aristocrats attended her wedding in 1944.[113] In order to raise funds from wealthy acquaintances she sought to rescue the League from its association with

under-staffed suburban vicarages, and rented a suite of rooms at the Mayfair Hotel, on the grounds that 'people judge you by the style you keep'.[114] She was also much better educated than Mrs Lovelock's circle. After reading economics and philosophy at Oxford, Crisp had played an active part in the United Empire Party revolt against Baldwin in 1930–31. Subsequently she travelled extensively on the Continent during the 1930s. Unable to find a publisher for the book that resulted, she had it privately printed. When, in 1942, the BBC refused to broadcast her views, the *Sunday Dispatch* employed her to write a ferociously nationalistic weekly column, devoted largely to attacking American designs on the British empire. This came to an abrupt end in September 1943 when the editor declined to print an article identifying Winston Churchill himself as the man responsible for mortgaging Britain's future to the US. Thereafter she wrote for other papers under an assumed name. With money won from a libel action against the *New Statesman*, she stood as an independent in the Acton by-election of December 1943 and in the 1945 general election for the St George's, Westminster division. She lost her deposit on both occasions. Undaunted, she published (privately) an autobiography of the first thirty-five years of her life, in which she reaffirmed her adolescent ambition to become Britain's first woman Prime Minister.[115] Introduced to the BHL leadership by a fellow journalist in March 1946, she quickly set about transforming it into a vehicle for her slightly insane ambitions, pausing only to give birth to her first child in July.[116]

As the storm over bread rationing blew itself out, the BHL leaders, determined not to be 'a nine-day press wonder' (like Mrs Were's 'Revolt'), set about consolidating their organization.[117] During the next twelve months Crisp spoke in fifty-seven different towns.[118] My reading of the national press at the high points of agitation in 1946 and 1947 turned up references to BHL activity in Scotland, Wales and every English region. Attempts to set up a structure of district and area committees, together with a publications committee to control day-to-day policy, were turned down as 'over-elaborate', although a regional tier of organization does appear to have existed in some areas.[119] In December the Merseyside Housewives' League, which claimed 10,000 members and had worked with the League since its formation in February, formally affiliated. Both Bristol and Cardiff sustained ten separate branches, and in Leeds the League claimed a substantial following.[120] The BHL clearly had a significant presence in the provinces as well as in the South East, though London suburbia and the Home Counties remained its primary stronghold. In the autumn of 1947 BHL claimed around 80,000 members. This was certainly an exaggeration. The only audited accounts show a total income of £3,449 in the year following July 1946. Since the annual subscription was one shilling, this would represent 68,980 members: but only if subscriptions constituted the League's sole income, which, of course, they did not. Receipts from donations, collections and articles in the press were also included in the

income figure, so the paying membership must have been very much less.[121] A more accurate measure of its effective membership may be given by the 15,000 circulation claimed for its *Newsletter* in February 1948.[122]

During the autumn of 1946 some at least of the branches held regular meetings, lobbied the local Food Office, retailers and MP, agitated for improved bus services for shoppers, set up baby-sitting circles and, in one case, a neighbourhood watch scheme.[123] Nationally, however, no coherent campaigning focus emerged until the fuel crisis of early 1947 when coal shortages, aggravated by extremely bad weather, brought much of British industry to a halt. Crisp, who took over the chairmanship at this time, launched the new campaign. Alongside a 'monster' petition calling for the dismissal of Shinwell (the coal minister) and Strachey, and the purchase of advertising space in local newspapers, Crisp announced a new commitment to militant direct action – synchronized chanting outside Food Offices; harassment of Whitehall and Westminster with deputations arriving in non-stop relays; telephone blockades of the Food and Fuel Ministries.[124]

The petition was directed not to Parliament but to the King, presumably because Crisp was hoping that the King could be persuaded to use his prerogative to dissolve Parliament and force an election, thereby defending popular liberties against despotic Ministers.[125] The resort to militancy had been foreshadowed by Crisp in October 1946 when she warned that while 'the Executive . . . does not incite its members to adopt . . . [the tactics of suffragette militancy] it most certainly does not promise the politicians that it either can or will prevent members and branches from adopting the tactics they think most likely to achieve results'.[126] Suffragette-style militancy had previously been resisted by Mrs Lovelock,[127] and the leader of the Reigate branch no doubt spoke for many members when she assured housewives that she had no intention of breaking Downing Street windows, or going on hunger strike.[128]

Undeterred by such attitudes among the membership, Crisp announced that tens of thousands of Northern housewives would march on London to join a Trafalgar Square demonstration in June:

> What they intend to do when they get here I will keep to myself for the moment, but the march on London is intended as a reversal of procedure of the march on Rome; that was to establish a totalitarian government, the march on London will be to stop any tendency at all towards totalitarianism in this country.[129]

The 'march on London' turned out to be another of Crisp's fantasies, although 500 people did come from Merseyside by coach. After lobbying Parliament and handing in a petition with 90,000 signatures, the women filled the Albert Hall – about 7,000 of them.[130] This was the largest rally the League ever held and the turn-out undoubtedly reflected the anger among Tory women in suburban London who were bombarding the Conservative

Party with demands for BHL style demonstrations and rallies.[131] The opening went well – Land of Hope and Glory, Rule Britannia – but as soon as Dorthy Crisp got up to speak a well-organized force of Communist women systematically disrupted the meeting, showering leaflets (and water from the fire buckets) from the gallery. Scuffles and uproar continued for the rest of the meeting.[132] After this few women had the stomach for further confrontations and the next day's rally in Trafalgar Square was a flop: 'Elegant Ladies stage small "hunger march"', crowed the *Daily Worker*. The anti-nationalization Road Haulage Association – which had (secretly) paid for the Albert Hall and was supposed to lead the demonstration with 150 cars – somehow got lost and never showed up. And when the few hundred marchers got to Hyde Park they found that the final rally had been called off: 'in order to outwit the Communists', as an organizer explained proudly to – of all people – the *Daily Worker* reporter.[133]

This ignominious collapse of the League's only serious attempt (apart from the agitation over bread rationing) at a national campaign, was followed by a major internal row. Four members of the twelve-woman Executive, including Mrs Bloice who had been Mrs Lovelock's right-hand woman until she was ousted as chairman by Crisp in March 1947, became so exasperated with what they saw as Crisp's dictatorship that they aired their complaints openly in the press. The conflict was precipitated by the suspension of the Treasurer.[134] The rebels, who identified themselves with the ordinary 'bob-a-nob' membership, objected to the expensive fund-raising parties Crisp held for 'her rich friends', and accused her of using her ability to bring in large donations to exercise a personal dictatorship over the organization.[135] There was also a larger issue of political strategy: 'if they were going to exist on shilling contributions they were not going to get very far', said Crisp.[136] Ever since she came into the League, Crisp had been keen for it to enter the electoral arena as an independent force.[137] The League's constitution, adopted in October 1946, committed it to encouraging housewives 'to take their place, *as such*, as Members of Parliament and local government councillors'.[138] A number of BHL members had stood in the November 1946 municipal elections, but most of them – including several of the Executive rebels – were thinly disguised Conservative candidates rather than genuine independents.[139] In August 1947 Crisp unveiled plans to turn the BHL into a fully-fledged political party by putting up fifty Parliamentary candidates. According to Crisp, Sir George Nelson, Chairman of English Electric and a recent President of the Federation of British Industry, was prepared to put in £1000 – a sum equal to nearly a third of the League's total declared income during the previous year. This, of course, would have made the position of Conservative Party members inside the BHL impossible: 'We are strictly non-political', Mrs Bloice told the *Daily Herald*, 'and we don't intend to let Miss Crisp's ambitions change the character of the League'.[140]

At a stormy meeting of branch delegates in September the rebels did themselves no good by trying to grab the microphone and, when it was

switched off, chanting abuse through a megaphone. The seventy branch chairmen who attended the meeting voted overwhelmingly for Crisp, and she claimed a majority amongst the 500 ordinary members present (though the result of this vote was contested). Crisp, who had entered the hall in style by walking down the centre aisle while the delegates stood for God Save the King – 'I'm not sure she couldn't be charged with high treason for that' remarked one of the rebels – revelled in the uproar: 'I've never in my life enjoyed myself so much as tonight. We want a good hard fight'.[141] Mrs Lovelock had no stomach for the fracas, fainting behind the scenes in her husband's arms.[142] Nevertheless she seems to have been bowled over by Crisp, forgiving her megalomania on the grounds that 'her passion in life is England. She loves England; is proud of her, is sure she has a great mission in the world. . . . There is something Elizabethan about Dorothy'.[143] It was Lovelock's support for Crisp at the September meeting which carried the day – she was 'a very honest, straight sort of person . . . we felt we could trust her'[144] – and the Executive rebels were subsequently expelled from the League. Though the rebels claimed that they had the support of nearly a third of the 250 branches, without Mrs Lovelock there was no real possibility of resisting Crisp's 'dictatorship'.[145]

The BHL loyalists believed that Mrs Bloice and her friends had been suborned by Conservative Central Office in an attempt to take over the BHL as a Tory front.[146] Certainly Central Office kept an eye on the League, and was happy to encourage individual members to work within it.[147] The leaders of the Conservative women were well aware both of the League's value as a means of harassing the Government, and of the potential danger represented by Miss Crisp.[148] In February 1947, Lord Woolton had encouraged a group of upper-class ladies in London to launch a rival organization – the Women's United Front: a non-party organization like the BHL but, as Central Office later explained, 'entirely friendly to us'.[149] Apart from organizing a rally, in April 1947, at which Crisp herself was invited to speak alongside Tory MPs,[150] the Women's United Front achieved little and it certainly lacked the suburban middle-class following that sustained the BHL. Rather than pursuing attempts to outflank the League with a rival 'independent' organization, the Conservative Party did what it could to contain the women's militancy by setting up local housewives' committees of its own.[151] While it is possible that the Conservatives might have simultaneously sought to limit any potential electoral threat from the BHL by backing Mrs Bloice and her friends, there is no evidence in Central Office files that they did.

In fact the Conservatives had no need to worry about the League. Crisp's victory was a pyrrhic one. Hostile press coverage of the internal row did much to destroy the credibility of the League as a political force, and led Sir George Nelson to withdraw his promised donation.[152] During the autumn Crisp claimed that membership was growing and would, 'within a few months', top the one million mark, putting the League in a position to force

the Government to do its bidding.[153] But this was wild talk, and by mid-December it was clear to Crisp that the BHL had run out of steam. Her response, a surprising one given that she had just seen off the pro-Conservative rebels, was to try to persuade Lord Woolton to find the cash necessary to enable the League to continue. She herself had already decided to resign as Chairman and offered, in return for such financial support, to 'send an individual message to each member asking them to join the Conservative Party'. When Woolton turned her down she confessed to being 'both disappointed and relieved . . . I have now resigned on personal grounds, but at least I feel that I did not let the whole thing go without making the final effort'.[154]

In February 1948, Central Office toyed with the idea of suggesting to Lady Rennell of the Women's United Front that, now that Crisp had gone, she might pursue an amalgamation of the two organizations: 'we should want to keep clear of this, but the Housewives' League under better leadership might continue to have some nuisance value'.[155] But nothing came of this, and Tory activists were subsequently advised to keep clear of the BHL: 'one of the evils of this country is the multiplicity of voluntary organisations which are usually for personal motives'.[156]

It seems probable that Lovelock knew nothing of Crisp's dealings with Woolton. Her subsequent devotion to keeping the League afloat as an independent organization certainly suggests that, had she known, she would not have approved. When, in June 1948, the BHL tried to make a come-back with a rally against Labour's 'totalitarian' welfare policy, its hostility to Tory appeasement spilled over into an accusation that the Conservatives had spent vast sums of money in an attempt to wreck the League. But the League was no longer newsworthy, and Central Office decided not to take legal action on the grounds that this would only give them publicity: 'the best thing you can do about the Housewives' League is to ignore it'.[157] The finances remained in a mess, and by the end of 1948 the circulation of the League's journal was well below 3,000.[158] The view of one leading Conservative, who heard Lovelock speak in December 1948, was that 'without Dorothy Crisp the whole . . . driving force of the movement had gone. Mrs Lovelock's few remarks, at any rate, were quite incoherent and unconstructive'.[159] Ever since Crisp's departure the Conservative Party had believed that the League would 'probably die out'.[160] In fact the League kept itself going with some imaginative small-scale photo opportunities, and a variety of campaigns in favour of Empire trade and, later, against the Common Market.[161] But, even as a marginal actor in national politics, the League had ceased to matter from the autumn of 1947.

Conclusion

The BHL was never a Tory front organization, nor can it be seen as a stunt got up by the right-wing press. While its moment of effective influence did not extend beyond 1947, and even at its peak its membership claims should

not be taken at face value, the League did win support in all parts of Britain and undoubtedly represented a genuine current of feeling amongst a section of (mainly) middle-class housewives.

Did the League offer a coherent political identity to its followers? They were, of course, fed up – 'the smiling mother of yesterday is the bad-tempered mother of today, and the understanding partner is now the nagging wife'.[162] Not many political leaders would choose to proclaim that every single member of her Executive had recently been ill because of poor food and the worry of managing everyday life.[163] But 'fed up' is not a political identity, and Mrs Lovelock's weekly compendium of miscellaneous grouses in the *Sunday Graphic* was not, in itself, sufficient to mobilize a sustained campaign. The morale necessary for positive revolt could not be built on grumbles alone.

There was nothing unique in the League's argument that what the housewife had to offer to the political life of the community was an instinctive grasp of the essentials of civilized life – the values of home and family. This was a commonplace of women's organizations across the political spectrum.[164] What was special about the BHL was that it offered to mobilize the ideology of domesticity as the basis for militant resistance to the totalitarian threat which they perceived in the Attlee Government. This placed them outside the post-war consensus – as critical of those dominant forces in the Conservative Party who appeased 'totalitarianism' as of those in the Government who perpetrated it. But it was not easy to reconcile militant resistance with the ideology of domesticity. What kind of activity would be appropriate in defending 'the freedom of the home'? Rallies, lobbying and petitioning were the staple diet of League activity, but were clearly insufficient to sustain it as an alternative to working within the Conservative Party. Two further possibilities were floated, both of them by Dorothy Crisp. The League could set itself the goal of creating an independent Women's Party with a sizeable presence in Parliament and local government. Any plausible attempt to revive Christabel Pankhurst's project of a Women's Party would, however, have required a far broader base among existing women's organizations than the BHL's paranoid anti-socialism was ever likely to construct. All that Crisp achieved by raising this spectre was to alienate an important part of the League's membership: those who saw it as an adjunct to their work within the Conservative Party.

The final possibility was to embrace 'suffragette methods' of direct action. Mrs Lovelock, who had a better grasp of her followers' psychology than the flamboyant and egotistical Crisp, always understood that militancy would be difficult to combine with the core values of domesticity. In the excitement of a rally women might be prepared to cheer the militant threats which Crisp delighted in making: even the inversion of the core identity of Mother as carer and coper to Mother as wielder of the rod of correction. But cheers were cheap, and BHL members clearly had no stomach for the sustained programme of direct action laid out for them by Crisp. Even when

directly challenged by the enemies of civilization – organized Communist disruption of the June 1947 Albert Hall meeting – BHL members responded, not by taking to the streets in righteous fury, but by staying at home. Whatever it would have taken to produce a genuine housewives' revolt, the BHL did not have it, and Crisp's threat that the organized housewives could 'at any moment if they so chose arrest the whole movement of national life' remained an empty one.[165] For a time, during 1946–47, the BHL represented a possibility that women would revolt against austerity in ways that would fundamentally challenge the constructive 'mend and make do' ethos which informed the role of 'housewife' in 1940s Britain: but this possibility was never realized. In the last analysis it seems, the 'militant housewife' was a contradiction in terms. 'Housewives' were people who coped. They did not go in for direct action. And even at the ballot box their revolt was remarkably restrained.

NOTES

1 Labour Party Women's Organisation, Annual Conference Report, April 1952, p. 12, quoted in Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1959*, 1992, p. 291.

2 Kenneth Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945–51*, Oxford, 1984, pp. 369–71; A Cairncross, *Years of Recovery: British economic policy 1945–51*, London, 1985, ch. 12; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Rationing, Austerity and the Conservative Party Recovery after 1945', *Historical Journal* 37: 1, 1994, pp. 176–8, 194–7.

3 Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Rationing', pp. 176, 181–2.

4 *Gallup Political Index*, February 1964.

5 Raymond Plant, Notes on the Findings of the Public Opinion Polls, Labour Party, *R.D.350*, April 1950, in Labour Party Archive, 1950 General Election, Box 2. Michael Young, the Labour Party's research director, was given details of the polls for June 1945 and February 1950 by BIPO's director, Henry Durant. For a full discussion of these poll findings see J. Hinton, 'Women and the Labour Vote, 1945–50', *Labour History Review* 57: 3, 1992.

6 Mass Observation, File Report 3160, September 1949. 250 middle-class housewives were questioned.

7 'Coming Down to Earth', *Economist*, 10 December 1949.

8 Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Rationing', pp. 188–9.

9 Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*; Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries. Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars*, 1987· Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism*, 1981; Mary Stott, *Organization Woman. The Story of the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds*, 1978.

10 This judgement rests on a reading of the papers of the Women's Group for Public Welfare in the Fawcett Library.

11 *Labour Woman*, throughout. See also the reports of the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations, the National Women's Advisory Committee, and the Labour Women's Conference in the TUC archive (Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Mss 292/61.5/3, 62/14.1; 65/2.2; 66/3), and in the Labour Party NEC papers (Harvester microform).

12 E. Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise. Women in Postwar Britain. 1945–1968*, 1980, pp. 167–8.

13 Wilson, *Only Halfway*, p. 167; P. Addison, *Now The War Is Over. A Social History of Britain, 1945–51*, 1985, pp. 40, 43. Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p. 291, writes of the Conservative Party 'orchestrating a campaign through the sympathetic press and the Housewives' League'.

14 Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies· Why do Women Vote Conservative?*, 1987, pp. 74,

76–77. Campbell is particularly interesting in her analysis of BHL ideology.

15 I am, however, grateful to the family of the BHL leader, Mrs Lovelock, for allowing me to see one chapter of her unpublished autobiography.

16 CP (45) 83, 15 July 1945, in PRO, CAB 66/67. On the Vigilantes see J. Hinton, 'Self-help and Socialism. The Squatters' Movement of 1946', *History Workshop*, 25, spring 1988, p. 125, footnote 122 and the references cited there.

17 *Evening News* (London), 6, 7, 9, 19, 25, 28 July 1945; *Evening Standard* (London), 11, 20 July 1945; Addison, *Now the War is Over*, p. 41.

18 BHL, *Newsletter*, December 1946; *Sunday Graphic*, 10 February 1946: *Willesden Chronicle*, 15 February 1946. Before her marriage Mrs Landau had trained as a teacher, studied at London University and taught in Tredegar for five years. Mrs Bloice, who worked with Lovelock from the start, had been involved in Conservative politics before the war. (BHL, *Newsletter*, October 1947.)

19 *Evening News* (London), 10 August 1945; House of Commons Debates, 23 August 1945, col. 757; *The Times*, 15 August 1945; Addison, *Now the War is Over*, p. 41.

20 Susan Cooper, '"Snoek Piquante". The trials and tribulations of the British housewife', in M. Sissons and P. French (eds), *Age of Austerity, 1945–51*, 1963, pp. 38–9.

21 House of Commons Debates, 6 February 1946, col. 1723; 14 February 1946, cols 592–95. Press reactions are surveyed in *Royal Commission on the Press, 1947–49 Report*, Cmd. 7700, 1949, pp. 322–351.

22 Mass Observation Diaries, Nella Last, 14 February 1946.

23 Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations, *Minutes*, 14 February 1946 (NEC *Minutes*, Labour Party archives); *Daily Herald*, 11, 13, 16 February 1946.

24 The squatters' movement of 1946 was equally dependent on press coverage for its spread. In the early 1980s the upsurge of the second wave of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament owed a good deal to the coverage given by sympathetic journalists.

25 Morrison attributed housewives' protests over bread rationing to the 'suppressions, misrepresentations, and inventions' purveyed by, among others, the 'Kemsley gramophone chain'. *Daily Graphic*, 9 July 1946

26 *Royal Commission on the Press, 1947–49: Report*, Cmd. 7700, 1949, p. 349.

27 *Liverpool Echo*, 30 January, 1, 6 February 1946.

28 *Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 1946; *Daily Sketch*, 8 February 1946, *Daily Herald*, 8 February 1946.

29 *Liverpool Echo*, 8, 12 February 1946.

30 *Liverpool Echo*, 12 February 1946. At the first rally she had announced: 'I have carefully chosen people for our committee to represent several political parties'. *Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 1946.

31 *Liverpool Post*, 16 February 1946; *Liverpool Echo*, 13 February 1946; *Daily Dispatch*, 15 February 1946.

32 *Liverpool Post*, 14 February 1946. They did not affiliate to the BHL until the end of 1946: *Sunday Graphic*, 5 January 1947.

33 *Daily Sketch*, 12 February 1946; *Daily Dispatch*, 12 February 1946.

34 *Daily Herald*, 15 February 1946; *Daily Worker*, 15 February 1946; June Macdonald, transcript of interview, Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster. Given the small size of this event – the only public activity undertaken by the League as such during the crisis – Addison's suggestion (*Now the War Is Over*, p. 42) that it was the BHL which forced the government to back down seems unlikely.

35 Mary Blakey and June Macdonald, transcripts.

36 *Sunday Graphic*, 3, 10, 24 March 1946.

37 Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Bread rationing in Britain, July 1946–July 1948', *Twentieth Century British History* 4: 1, 1993; Strachey to Cabinet, 26 June 1946, PRO, PREM 8/502.

38 British Institute of Public Opinion (BIPO), May 1946, data in ESRC Data Archive, University of Essex, Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Bread rationing', p. 79. The BHL argued, chauvinistically, that continental food shortages were being exaggerated and that Britain was being cheated of its fair share of available supplies. (*Sunday Graphic*, 26 May 1946). At the founding meeting of the Merseyside Housewives' League women who dared to point out that British living standards were high by continental standards were howled down. (*Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 1946.) Nearly half the population agreed with the BHL about this. (BIPO, July 1946, as above.)

39 *The Times*, the *News Chronicle* and the three main political weeklies all agreed that the Government was at fault in not giving sufficient information on the world situation to justify its decision.

40 *Daily Sketch*, 17, 21, 24 June 1946; *Daily Graphic* (as the *Sketch* was renamed on 1 July), 3 July 1946; *The Times*, 29 June 1946; *Daily Mail*, 25 June 1946; *Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1946.

41 *Daily Telegraph*, 17 July 1946; *Daily Graphic*, 15 July 1946. The *Daily Express* also gave a figure of 200,000. The *Liverpool Post* and the *News Chronicle* both said 165,000.

42 At the end of July Mrs Were was suffering from nervous exhaustion following her involvement in a fracas with a (Communist?) opponent. *Daily Worker*, 31 July 1946.

43 *Sunday Graphic*, 7 July 1946; *Bromley and Kentish Times*, 5 July 1946; Irene Lovelock, 'Autobiography', ch. 8, p. 6.

44 *Bristol Evening World*, 2, 4, 10 July 1946. In the Bristol case the regional organizer was Mrs Bowley, who had already organized a League branch in Bath. *Sunday Graphic*, 7 April.

45 *The Times*, 8, 9 July 1946; *Daily Telegraph*, 1 July 1946; *Daily Sketch*, 27 June 1946; *Daily Graphic*, 1 July 1946. Tory women also organized petitions, though on nothing like the scale of the independent housewives' organizations.

46 *Daily Sketch*, 24, 29 June 1946.

47 *Daily Worker*, 19 July 1946; *Daily Dispatch*, 18 March 1946. Tennant was the wife of the former secretary of the pro-Nazi Anglo-German Fellowship. She produced a poster pledging to print the names of all MPs who voted for bread rationing as enemies of the people, which led to an investigation by the Commons committee on parliamentary privilege. HC Deb., 18 July 1946, cols 1386–87

48 The Chairman of the Bromley Branch, and editor of the journal that eventually became the League's official organ – *Housewives Today* – had been involved with Social Credit in 1940 (*The Social Crediter*, 21 September 1940, p. 12), an organization which gave voice on 26 April 1941 to the bizarre view that Hitler himself was an agent of 'pluto-criminal' world Jewry. I am grateful to Martin Durham for this information.

49 *Daily Express*, 15 July 1946; *Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 1946; *The Times*, 16 July 1946. BHL rallies in London seem to have acted as a magnet for neo-fascist organizations: see the *Daily Worker* report of its biggest rally on 7 July 1947.

50 *Sunday Graphic*, 30 June 1946.

51 *The Times*, 9 July 1946; *Daily Sketch*, 29 June 1946.

52 *Daily Graphic*, 2 July 1946.

53 On the bakers' revolt see *Royal Commission on the Press, 1947–49: Report*, Cmd. 7700, 1949, p. 321; I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Bread rationing', pp. 82–3.

54 Strachey to Cabinet, 19 July, 1946, PRO, PREM 8/502.

55 Cabinet Minutes, 21 July 1946; Attlee to Morrison, 20 July 1946, PRO, PREM 8/502. Interestingly Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, was not swayed by these arguments and backed Strachey and Morrison.

56 Morrison to Attlee, 19 July 1946, PRO, PREM 8/502.

57 Report of Chief Women's Officer to National Conference of Labour Women, October 1946, Mss 292/65.2/2, TUC archive, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick; *Labour Woman*. July 1946, p. 156.

58 Wilkinson to Attlee, 21 July 1946, PRO, PREM 8/502.

59 *Sunday Graphic*, 21 July 1946; Strachey, draft statement on suspension of rationing, 20 July 1946, PRO, PREM 8/502

60 J. Hinton, 'Women and the Labour Vote', pp. 59–60; Susan Cooper, '"Snoek Piquante"', pp. 38–9.

61 BIPO, June, July 1946.

62 Mass Observation Topic Box 6, File B, 28 June 1946.

63 *Labour Woman*. July 1946, p. 156; Report of Chief Women's Officer to National Conference of Labour Women, October 1946; *Labour Woman*. July 1946, p 156, Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Bread rationing', p. 79. This certainly is the general line taken by working-class housewives interviewed by Mass Observation in June 1946, Mass Observation Topic Box 6, File B, 28 June 1946. Commenting on this paradox a letter published in the *Bristol Evening World* (8 July, 1946) remarked: 'One wonders what the womenfolk who live in less salubrious districts than Henleaze, who will feel the rationing far worse, are doing about it. Maybe they are hard at work doing a useful job'.

64 BIPO, July, August 1946

65 F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Statistics, 1918–1970*, 1971, p. 27. The Bexley swing, however, may have had more to do with the withdrawal of the Liberal candidate than with the class composition of the constituency.

66 *Daily Herald*, 8 February 1946. For evidence of involvement of individual working-class women in the BHL see *Liverpool Echo*, 6 June 1947; *Daily Worker*, 9 June 1947.

67 M. Morgan, 'The Women's Institutes in the 1940s', paper delivered at Institute of Contemporary History Conference, July 1991; Stott, *Organisation Woman*, ch. 3.

68 This point was clearly made by Caroline Haslett, chair of Make and Mend Sub-Committee of the Women's Group for Public Welfare, *Minutes*, 3 April 1943, Fawcett Library, WF B7.

69 Conservative Party Central Women's Advisory Committee, *Minutes*, 11 July 1946; National Federation of Women's Institutes to E. Walker, 8 July 1946, PRO, MAF 102/20.

70 For the involvement of middle-class women's voluntary organizations in the management of austerity see, in particular, the files of the Women's Group for Public Welfare in the Fawcett Library.

71 *Sunday Graphic*, 21 July 1946.

72 See resolutions submitted to the National Conference of Labour Women in 1946 and 1948 (Mss 292/65.2/2, TUC archive, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick), and similar grievances expressed by women attending Make and Mend classes in 1945 who: 'feel strongly that household goods and workmen's clothes ought not to require ordinary coupons as the mother always has to give them up'. (Women's Forum, File B9, Fawcett Library). For BHL comments on the issues see: *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham News*, 12 April 1946; *Daily Telegraph*, 11 February 1946.

73 *Liverpool Post*, 16 February 1946; *Liverpool Echo*, 12 February 1946.

74 *Daily Herald*, 15 February 1946.

75 *Daily Mirror*, 19 August 1946.

76 See *Evening News*, for July 1945. In Liverpool agitation about queues laid the basis for the take-off of the League in February 1946, (*Liverpool Echo*, 30 January, 1, 6 February 1946) and the same is true of the Medway towns in June 1946 (*Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham News*, 14, 21 June 1946).

77 June Macdonald, transcript of interview, Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, quoted in Addison, *Now the War is Over*, p. 41.

78 *Sunday Graphic*, 24 February, 28 April, 12 May, 6, 20, 27 October 1946, 1 June 1947, *Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 4 October 1946, *Housewives Today*, May-June 1948.

79 *Sunday Graphic*, 1 June 1947. There was much left-wing hostility in the late 1940s to what was seen as waste and profiteering in distributive trades (e.g. K. Butler, 'Wanted: A Housewives' Strike', *Picture Post*, 22 October 1949). Conservative Party propaganda, on the other hand, was concerned to defend the shopkeeper and redirect housewife anger at the Government. (*Home Truths*, September 1950, Conservative Party archive.)

80 June Macdonald, transcript.

81 June Macdonald, transcript.

82 *Sunday Graphic*, 27 October 1946. For evidence of this yearning see the 'open letter to some shopkeepers' published by the novelist Marguerite Steen in the London *Evening News*, 12 July 1945 which provoked 'our heaviest postbag for many months' (*Evening News*, 18 July, 1945). Warning shopkeepers (somewhat prematurely) that the end of rationing was in sight – and with it their whip hand – Steen wrote: 'we are sick and tired of your rudeness, and of fawning and simpering to get honest value for money from you. What has happened to English courtesy . . .?'

83 *Housewives Today*, April 1947, p. 4.

84 *Housewives Today*, April 1947, p 2. The BHL spent much effort seeking to dispute the Government's claim that, despite austerity, living standards had risen since before the war. The fact was that while working-class families were better off, this was certainly not the case for the women the League spoke for.

85 Communist Party leaflet distributed at BHL rally, 6 June 1947, in CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive; Sir Hartley Shawcross, speech reported in *The Times*, 20 July 1947.

86 Rhona Cooper to Lord Woolton, 7 February 1947, in CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive

87 *Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 12 July, 25 October 1946.

88 House of Commons Debates, 18 July 1946, col 1455.

89 He was one of only two MPs to vote against a second reading for the Insurance Bill in February 1946. H. C. Deb., 11 February 1946, cols 44–50, 93, 102, 105. In June 1946 he was receiving petitions from houswives' groups all over the country: *Daily Sketch*, 27 June 1946.

90 In July 1947 Woolton told a Tory women's conference: 'the BHL has no connection with, nor is it financed by the Conservative Party. I have never to the best of my knowledge seen the people who are running the League. I have had no conferences with them of any sort, either directly or indirectly'. (*Western Mail*, 3 July 1947.)

91 *Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 4 October 1946; BHL, *Newsletter*, November 1946. See also Mrs Luffingham's letter to the *New Statesman*, 27 July 1946.

92 BHL, *Newsletter*, November 1946.

93 Dorothy Crisp, *A Light in the Night*, 1960, p. 22; BHL, *Newsletter*, October 1947.

94 In 1941 she was denouncing state provision of nurseries for working mothers as part of an orchestrated attack on private property and the family: 'pure Russian Communism'. *The Social Crediter*, 26 April, 1941. I am grateful to Martin Durham for this reference.

95 *Housewives Today*, April 1947. See also the testimony of Mrs Blakey, a BHL activist, who had not voted in 1945 because 'there really was no choice. Both parties had the same policy in regard to the introduction of new areas of compulsion, . . . introduction of the welfare state', transcript of interview, Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster.

96 Printed report of Kingsway Hall meeting organized by Women's United Front on 28 April 1947, pp. 15–17, in CCO 3/1/30, Conservative Party Archive; *Housewives Today*, November–December 1947. An interesting MO report fully accepted that the BHL was not a Tory front organization, seeing it instead as a potential component of a mass neo-fascist party: Mass Observation, *File Report 2415*, 3 August 1946.

97 *Sunday Graphic*, 4 August 1946.

98 BHL, *Newsletter*, November 1946.

99 BHL, *Newsletter*, August 1946, June, July–August, 1947.

100 *Sunday Graphic*, 31 March, 14 April 1946. Mrs Lovelock was no intellectual· she believed homework was bad for school children since it prevented them from being 'taught the real things that mattered, the way to run a home and cook and make clothes, to be true citizens'. (*Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 4 October 1946)

101 *Sunday Graphic*, 1 June 1947.

102 *Housewives Today*, April 1947.

103 *Housewives Today*, August–September 1947, p. 6. Mrs Blakey recalled: 'Children got milk at school. But as soon as the holidays began they didn't get the . . . milk delivered at home. It was as though you could get things via institutions but not . . . via your mother and father', transcript.

104 *Housewives Today*, July–August, 1948, June, 1947; BHL, *Newsletter*, November 1946; Palmer to Churchill, 22 June 1948, Palmer to Maxse 18, 26 January 1949, in CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive.

105 *Sunday Graphic*, 21 July 1946.

106 *Sunday Graphic*, 23 June 1946.

107 The blasphemous tone of this remark gave the Tories a field day in Parliament: *The Times*, 6, 12, 15 May 1947.

108 Conservative MP Maxwell-Fyffe speaking on BHL platform: *The Times*, 7 June 1947. When a BHL speaker made this same point at a rally in April 1947, she received the biggest applause of the evening. (Sturgess-Jones, report to Central Office on Kingsway Hall meeting organized by Women's United Front on 28 April 1947, in CCO 3/1/30, Conservative Party Archive; see also the printed report of this meeting, p. 15, in this file.)

109 *Housewives Today*, April 1947.

110 Printed report of Kingsway Hall meeting organized by Women's United Front on 28 April 1947, p. 26, in CCO 3/1/30, Conservative Party Archive; BHL, *Newsletter*, June 1947.

111 Kingsway Hall meeting, 28 April 1947, p. 18.

112 Irene Lovelock, 'Autobiography', ch. 8, pp. 5–6, 13

113 *The Times*, 22 March 1944.

114 Lovelock, 'Autobiography', ch. 8, p. 3.

115 D. Crisp, *A Life for England*, 1946.

116 'Having a baby to Dorothy Crisp is all in the day's march and certainly must not interfere with the main job of Dorothy Crisp's life'. (Lovelock, 'Autobiography', ch. 8, p. 5.)

117 Mrs Luffingham, letter to *New Statesman*, 27 July 1946; *Sunday Graphic*, 22 September 1946.

118 Crisp, *Light in the Night*, p. 20.

119 Lovelock, 'Autobiography', ch. 8, p. 6.

120 *Sunday Graphic*, 4 January 1947; Kingsway Hall meeting, 28 April 1947, p. 16.

121 BHL, *Newsletter*, October, November 1947. The one-shilling subscription rate is given in *Daily Sketch*, 14 February 1946 and *The Times*, 12 September 1947.

122 Crisp to Woolton, 1 February 1948, in CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive. A year earlier the League had claimed a 'five-figure circulation' for the *Newsletter: Sunday Graphic*, 4 January 1947.

123 *Sunday Graphic*, 22 September, 27 October, 1 December 1946; BHL, *Newsletter*, January 1947; Mrs Blakey, transcript.

124 BHL, *Newsletter*, February–March, 1947.

125 The BHL was keen to emphasize the constitutional point that Britain was ruled by 'the King in and through Parliament'. (BHL, *Newsletter*, November 1946.)

126 *Newsletter*, October 1946.

127 The issue of militancy had been debated at the League's rally in February 1946, where the platform resisted attempts to commit the organization to 'suffragette methods' as against their own 'constitutional' programme (*Daily Sketch*, 15 February 1946). Mrs Lovelock declared: 'We women are law abiding and deplore the recent action of the "squatters" . . .', *Sunday Graphic*, 22 September 1946.

128 *Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 23 August 1946.

129 Kingsway Hall meeting, 28 April 1947, p. 16; BHL, *Newsletter*, May 1947; *Liverpool Echo*, 6 June 1947; *Sunday Graphic*, 1 June 1947.

130 *The Times*, 7 June 1946; *Daily Express*, 7 June 1947; *Liverpool Echo*, 6 June 1947.

131 Conservative Party, Essex and Middlesex provincial Area Council, *Minutes*, 17 June, 1 July, 19 September 1947, ARE 8/24/1, Conservative Party Archive.

132 Report on the rally by Dorothy Spencer; Communist Party leaflet distributed at BHL rally, 6 June 1947, both in CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive; *Daily Herald*, 9 June 1947, *Daily Worker*, 7 June 1947.

133 *Daily Worker*, 9 June 1947; *The Times*, 9 June 1947; *Sunday Graphic*, 8 June 1947, BHL, *Newsletter*, May 1947, Crisp, *Light in the Night*, p. 21.

134 *Sunday Express*, 7 September 1947.

135 *Daily Herald*, 8, 12 September 1947; Crisp, *Light in the Night*, p. 23.

136 *The Times*, 12 September 1947.

137 BHL, *Newsletter*, October 1946.

138 BHL, *Newsletter*, November 1946, my italics (JH).

139 Crisp, *Light in the Night*, p. 23. Dorothy Welfare, founder of the Reigate BHL was elected, clearly running on the Conservative ticket: *Surrey Mirror and County Post*, 25 October, 8 November 1946.

140 Crisp, *Light in the Night*, p. 23; *Daily Herald*, 8 September 1947.

141 *Daily Herald*, 12 September 1947; *Daily Express*, 7 June, 12 September 1947; *The Times*, 12 September 1947; *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1947. Crisp loved rowdy meetings: Crisp, *Life for England*, pp. 14–15, 27.

142 *Daily Herald*, 12 September 1947.

143 Lovelock, 'Autobiography', ch. 8, p. 2. In March 1947 her support for Crisp had been strained by her loyalty to Mrs Bloice (p. 13) and at this time Crisp even risked an open attack on Lovelock's judgement. (BHL, *Newsletter*, February–March 1947.) But whatever she felt about this, she clearly backed Crisp at the September meeting.

144 June Macdonald, transcript. 'She was one of those people whose face shines through everything she does and says'; Mrs Blakey, transcript.

145 *Sunday Express*, 7 September 1947 Crisp disputed this and said there were no more than 200 members involved in the rebellion. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1947.

146 Mrs Hoyle-Smith, speech at Kingsway Hall meeting, 21 June 1948, reported to Central Office by Katherine Wilmot, CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive.

147 Woolton to Cooper, 3 March 1947, CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive.

148 Spencer to Maxse, 10 February 1948; Maxse to Lady Rennell, 11 February 1948, CCO 3/1/30, Conservative Party Archive.

149 Maxse to Cook, 18 February 1948; Spencer to Maxse, 10 February 1948, CCO 3/1/30, Conservative Party Archive. The WUF was led by Lady Rennell, who had a right-wing feminist past as secretary of an anti-discriminatory Chain Makers' League.

150 Lady Rennell, it seems, had already been a political supporter of Dorothy Crisp's at the time of the Acton by-election in 1944. Crisp, *Life for England*, p. 276.

151 Central Women's Advisory Committee, *Minutes*, 17 April, 18 May, 16 October 1947, 12 February 1948, Conservative Party Archive.

152 Crisp, *Light in the Night*, p. 23.

153 BHL, *Newsletter*, November–December 1947.

154 Crisp to Woolton, 9 February, 1948, CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive, see also earlier correspondence between them in the same file; *Daily Herald*, 9 February 1948. The 'personal grounds' were that she was pregnant again, and her doctor had told her that she must slow down. But she still made one last effort to get cash out of Woolton to launch a new journal. Her life was then engulfed by catastrophe: her husband, who volunteered as a special Constable in Singapore, was shot dead four days after the baby was born, and her private publishing enterprise collapsed leaving her with debts that were eventually to put her in Holloway ten years later.She published a long and embittered account of these disasters, *A Light in the Night*, in 1960.

155 Spencer to Maxse, 10 February 1948, CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive.

156 Maxse to Thomas, 12 March 1948, CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive.

157 O'Brien to Maxse, June 1948, CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive The BHL meeting received no press coverage: *Housewives Today*, July–August 1948.

158 *Housewives Today*, November–December, 1948. Crisp's, BHL, *Newsletter*, which had claimed a 'five-figure circulation' in January 1947, folded when Crisp abandoned the League

159 Sturge-Jones to Fletcher, 14 December 1948, CCO 3/1/12, Conservative Party Archive.

160 Central Women's Advisory Committee, *Minutes*, 12 February 1948, Conservative Party Archive.

161 *Evening Standard*, 29 March 1949; *Housewives Today*, May–June, 1949, and throughout; Mrs Blakey, transcript of interview, Centre for North West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster: CCO 3/3/24 and 3/4/15, Conservative Party Archive.

162 *Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 1946.

163 Mrs Lovelock in *Sunday Graphic*, 10 February 1946

164 Mary Sutherland, 'The Work of Housewife and Mother', *Labour Woman*, February 1944; C. Luetkens, *Women and a New Society*, New Democracy, 1946, pp 122–3; *When Peace Comes. A National Programme from the Standpoint of Women*, Conservative Women's Reform Group, April 1944; Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, throughout.

165 BHL. *Newsletter*, June 1947.